

Message Text

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72

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /068 W

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R 271629Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3246

INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, BE

SUBJECT: RISING UNEMPLOYMENT IN WALLONIA TROUBLES TINDEMANS
GOVERNMENT

REF: BRUSSELS 892

SUMMARY. LABOR PROTEST RALLIES IN LIEGE AND CHARLEROI
AREAS POINT UP WORSENING UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM IN
WALLONAI AND ITS POTENTIAL THREAT TO STABILITY OF
TINDEMANS COALITION GOVERNMENT. FRANCOPHONE COALITION PARTNERS
ARE UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE TO OBTAIN RELIEF FOR
THIS REGION. OPPOSITION SOCIALIST PARTY ADDS TO
COALITION PROBLEMS BY BOYCOTTING REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN PROTEST TO SHORTCOMINGS OF GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC POLICY IN REGION.
SO FAR, COALITION TENSIONS HAVE NOT MOUNTED ENOUGH TO THREATEN
STABILITY OF GOVERNMENT BUT COMBINED WITH OTHER
PROBLEMS AFFLICTING TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT, IT COULD LEAD
TO CRISIS SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

1. AS REPORTED REFTTEL, RISING UNEMPLOYMENT IN
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FRANCOPHONE AREA (WALLONIA), IS TROUBLING TINDEMANS

GOVERNMENT WITH THE TWO FRANCOPHONE COALITION PARTNERS, PARTICULARLY THE SMALL FRANCOPHONE REGIONAL PARTY, THE WALLOON RALLY (RW) BECOMING MORE IMPATIENT WITH GOVERNMENT INACTION IN THAT REGION. MAJOR DEMONSTRATIONS, WHICH BROUGHT CITIES TO NEAR STANDSTILL FOR SEVERAL HOURS, WERE HELD FEBRUARY 20 IN LIEGE AREA AND FEBRUARY 24 IN CHARLEROI. IN LATTER COMMUNITY - PERHAPS MOST DEPRESSED AREA IN BELGIUM - APPROXIMATELY 30,000 MARCHED TO TWON HALL TO HEAR LEADERS OF TWO NATIONAL LABOR CENTERS (THE SOCIALIST FGTB AND THE CHRISTIAN CSC) DEMAND GOVERNMENT DO SOMETHING ABOUT SPREADING UNEMPLOYMENT (NOW SIX PERCENT NATIONALLY). PRESENT WERE POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE FRANCOPHONE COALITION PARTNERS PARTI SOCIAL CHRISTIEN (PSC) (FRANCOPHONE WING OF TINDEMANS' SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY), AND RASSEMBLEMENT WALLON (RW).

2. RESTIVE WALLOON RALLY LEADERS HAVE REPEATEDLY VOICED DISSATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT REGIONALIZATION POLICY, WHICH THEY INSIST SHOULD FEATURE SPECIAL EFFORT FOR WALLONIAN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT. RW BUREAU CALLED FEBRUARY 24 FOR SUMMIT MEETING COALITION PARTY LEADERS AND IMMEDIATE ACTION TO CREATE A PUBLIC HOLDING COMPANY FOR WALLOON REGION (DRAFT LAW ON THIS HOLDING COMPANY HAS BEEN UNDER STUDY IN MINECONOMIC AFFAIRS FOR SOME TIME).

3. IN MEANTIME, OPPOSITION SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB) IS CONTINUING TO MAKE LIFE HARD FOR GOVERNMENT IN REGIONAL COUNCILS BY REFUSING PARTICIPATE IN ANY REGIONAL BODY. IT ALSO PLANS TO HELP FUEL ON FIRE UNDER PRIMIN TINDEMANS, SCHEDULING NATIONAL PROTEST MEETING IN BRUSSELS FOR MARCH 15. SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER WILLY CLAES, WHO WILL REPLACE RETIRING JOS VAN EYNDE AS FLEMISH COPRESIDENT OF PSB AT PARTY CONGRESS MARCH 1, HAS ANNOUNCED THAT A SHADOW GOVERNMENT WILL BE FORMED FOLLOWING THAT CONGRESS.

COMMENT. GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SEEKING TO DEAL WITH UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM ON AD HOC BASIS, REFUSING SO FAR TO COME TO GRIPS WITH POLITICALLY DIFFICULT PROBLEM OF REGIONAL BUDGET WHERE IT WILL HAVE TO MAKE HARD CHOICES BETWEEN DEMANDS OF COMPETING REGIONS. THIS IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRIMARILY DUE TO HEAVY INFLUENCE OF FLEMISH DIVISION OF SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (CVP) IN COALITION WHICH HAS DELAYED REGIONALIZATION OF BUDGET. CHARLEROI RALLY HAS HIGHLIGHTED PRESSURE WHICH FRANCOPHONE COALITION PARTIES, PSC AND RW, ARE UNDER TO BRING ECONOMIC RELIEF TO WALLOON REGION. STRAINS PLACED ON TINDEMANS COALITION GOVERNMENT BY WALLOON ECONOMIC TROUBLES ARE NOT NOW INTOLERABLE. BUT SITUATION

IS NOT UNDER CONTROL. COMBINED WITH RECENT RESURGENCE OF
LINGUISTIC STRIFE (BEING REPORTED SEPARATELY), IT
COULD BRING YEAR-OLD TINDEMANS' REGIME TO A CRISIS.
SOCIALISTS HOPE THAT FINE DAY WILL COME IN MAY.
FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNEMPLOYMENT, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE01705
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750070-0311
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975028/aaaaagwc.tel
Line Count: 120
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRUSSELS 892
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <17 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RISING UNEMPLOYMENT IN WALLONIA TROUBLES TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT
TAGS: ELAB, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006